

## Unconditional self-acceptance among the psychology students of University X, Malaysia: the role of mattering, perceived social support and state self-esteem

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### ABSTRACT

Unconditional self-acceptance (USA) is important for mental health. Studies reported that university students would develop the USA when they feel socially supported, included, and matter. Nevertheless, those factors are dependent on social feedbacks. Amidst the COVID-19 outbreak is, they had to follow the social distancing protocols and interact online with each other. This change might have altered the way they perceive the social support and mattering. It is hypothesized that these alterations predicted their USA through their perceived social support (PSS) and the sense of social inclusion (state self-esteem). To test the hypothesis, 214 young adults (85 men, 129 women), aged between 18 to 25 ( $M=22.80$ ,  $SD=1.92$ ) were asked to complete a demographic form and the scales of each variable. Students from University X, Malaysia were chosen as the population as they studied fully online when we started this study; unfortunately, the university went back to physical study before we managed to collect our target sample size. The results of Bootstrapping with 5,000 samples and 95% confidence interval showed that state self-esteem (SSE) fully mediated the relationship between mattering and USA, while PSS did not. Therefore, the hypothesis of serial mediation was not supported.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Unconditional self-acceptance (USA) is an important factor for mental health stability of university students. Previous studies also reported that this population would accept themselves more unconditionally when they feel they matter to others and perceive that they have the support from the people around them. Nevertheless, it is imperative to note that both the sense of mattering and the perceived social support are dependent on social feedbacks from social interactions. One of the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak is the change of social interaction pattern. When governments enforced the social distancing protocols, many of us have shifted from in-person works and classrooms into remote online work and study. Not only that, most of the social interactions also took place online due to the social distancing protocols. As a result, individuals tend to rely more on social media and online communication as the sources of feedback. This tendency had affected the way individuals perception of being socially supported and whether they matter to others. It is hypothesized that their altered sense of mattering predicted their USA through their perceived social support (PSS) and the sense of being socially included or excluded (state self-esteem). To test the hypothesis, 214 young adults (85 males, 129 females), aged between 18 to 25 ( $M=22.80$ ,  $SD=1.92$ ) were asked

to complete a demographic form, general mattering scale (GMS), unconditional self-acceptance questionnaire, and multidimensional scale of perceived social support, and state self-esteem scale. Undergraduate students from University X in Malaysia were chosen to be the population as during the early state of this study, they were still studying remotely online. Nevertheless, the target sample size of 350 was not achieved as in the middle of the study, this university had enforced in-person physical classroom again; thus the data was only collected from the students who were studying fully online.

Inclination towards the remote online communication, especially in the form of social media predicted higher levels of fear of missing out social feedback (FOMO) of their users [1], [2] and furthermore, they would likely to evaluate themselves in different ways [3]. For instance, before the high inclination towards remote social interaction in social media (pre-COVID/pre-lockdown), people might bump into each other and give each other spontaneous social feedback, such as smiles, nods, hugs, and handshakes [4], [5]; such things would not likely to take place during the pandemic outbreak, as most of the social interaction was conducted online; thus, we would only see the people we have planned to see and discuss about the subjects that we have planned to discuss [6], [7]. This shift had significantly reduced the in-person social feedback that we used to receive and provide to each other [8]–[10], and it is not without any further effect.

previous studies suggested that university students would likely to accept themselves better if they believe they matter to others. However, the impact of COVID-19 on social interaction might have altered the perception of mattering and social support, especially among young adults as they are still adapting to adulthood [11]. This study aimed to investigate the role of perceived social support (PSS) and state self-esteem (SSE) on the association between mattering and unconditional self-acceptance (USA) university students who were locked down and must conduct their studies fully online during the pandemic in Klang Valley, Malaysia. The sample included 214 young adults (85 males, 129 females), aged between 18 to 25 ( $M=22.80$ ,  $SD=1.92$ ). Participants were asked to complete an online version of demographic form, General Mattering Scale, Unconditional Self-Acceptance Questionnaire, Multidimensional Scale Of Perceived Social Support, and State Self-Esteem Scale. Purposive sampling was employed in recruiting participants. Data analysis was conducted by employing PROCESS Macro Model 6 and Bootstrap Method with 95% confidence interval and 5,000 samples. As hypothesized, the results showed that SSE significantly mediated the relationship between mattering and USA among young adults. Conversely, PSS did not significantly mediate the relationship between mattering. Specifically, there was no direct effect of mattering on USA when controlling for SSE. In other words. SSE fully mediated the link between mattering and USA while PSS did not. Therefore, the hypothesis of serial mediation was not supported, although we discovered the full mediation role of SSE in the equation.

Studies in the past have advocated that unconditional self-acceptance (USA) is an important condition for positive mental health as it helped individuals to avoid mental health problems, such as depression, anxiety, or suicidal thought [12]–[14]. Another study in the context of Malaysian university students) reported that the development of USA was no longer the same as before the pandemic [15]; Advocating that the difference was caused by the change of social interaction pattern, they supported the finding of Casale & Flett [3] that individuals who worked or studied online during the outbreak would likely to incline more towards social media and online communication to get social feedback. Such inclination has altered their way to evaluate themselves; they tend to develop higher fear of missing out social feedback from others or FOMO [6]. In other words, they would likely to develop lower state self-esteem (SSE) [1] when they did not receive any meaningful social feedback from their social networks as they feel left out or socially excluded [16]. As the social media involves a large number of users, they might not find specific social feedback as frequent as when they were more inclined towards in-person social interaction with their friends and family members. therefore, there was a tendency to develop lower levels of SSE during the time when they had to work or study remotely [17]. The aforementioned situation was supported by another study, reporting that when the sense of mattering is lowered, as the social feedback was not satisfied the need to matter, the SSE would likely to be significantly reduced. At the same time, the lowered mattering would also make someone believe that they are not socially supported [18], and in the end, they would not be able to accept themselves [17] unconditionally [15].

Based on the aforesaid references, this current study aims to examine whether the sense of mattering significantly contributes to the development of the USA through PSS and SSE. In other words, this study investigates whether PSS and SSE performed a serial mediation on the link between the sense of mattering and USA among the the students of University X, Malaysia during the COVID-19 outbreak.

Contextually, the uncertainty during the pandemic outbreak is considered life crises to many young adults; thereby, we take the pandemic time, including the lockdown policy that came with it, as a unique situation that had never been experienced before the outbreak, and hopefully would not be experienced again in the future. Based on the previous literature, we hypothesized that i) mattering significantly predicts USA among the participants; ii) PSS significantly mediates the relationship between mattering and USA among them; iii) SSE significantly mediates the relationship between mattering and USA; iv) PSS and SSE performed

a serial mediation on the relationship between mattering and USA. Figure 1 illustrates the hypothetical model of the serial mediation relationship in this current study.

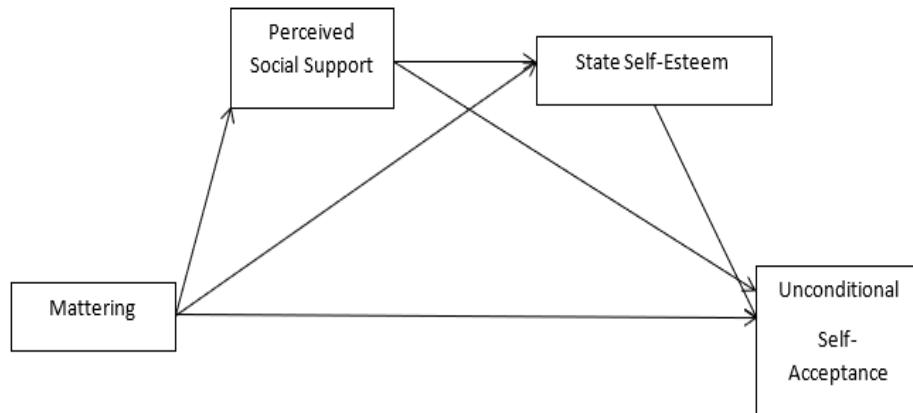


Figure 1. The hypothetical model of serial mediation

Figure 1. Illustrates the serial mediation hypothesis. It is hypothesized that PSS mediates the link between mattering and SSE, as well as mattering and USA, while SSE mediates the link between mattering and USA. Therefore, the PSS and SSE perform a serial mediation on the association between PSS and USA

## 2. RESEARCH METHOD

### 2.1. Participants

It is important for us to inform the readers that the study was meant for a larger population, university students in Klang Valley, Malaysia who were in the midst of online studying due to social distance protocol. Nevertheless, the protocol was lifted during our data collection time, and therefore we could not recruit more than what we have reported here as the rest of the population had gone back to in-person (physical) classroom learning and have experienced both methods sequentially.

As the estimated population size of the students who experienced fully online class during the data collection of this study was about 500, According to Krejcie and Morgan table [30], the sample size of 217 was sufficient to recruit for the current study. Initially, a number of 220 participants were successfully recruited for the study until 6 responses were eliminated as there were deemed multivariate outliers. Thus, only 214 responses were taken into account for this study. As indicated in Table 1, participants were composed of 85 male participants ( $N=85$ ) and 129 female participants ( $N=129$ ) between 18 to 25 years of age ( $M=22.80$ ,  $SD=1.92$ ). The recruited participants consisted of three main ethnicities of Peninsular Malaysia, namely the Chinese, the Malays and the Indians. Collected data accounted for 59.3% of Chinese ( $N=127$ ), 25.7% of Malay ( $N=55$ ), and 15% of Indian ( $N=32$ ). Participants were recruited through purposive sampling. Only Malaysian who aged 18 to 25, currently resides in Klang Valley, and has basic level of English proficiency were allowed to participate in the current research. Table 1 shows the demographic information of participants.

Table 1. Demographic information of sample ( $N=214$ )

Characteristics	Frequency ( $n$ )	Percentage of sample (%)
Gender		
Male	85	39.7
Female	129	60.3
Race/Ethnicity		
Chinese	127	59.3
Malay	55	25.7
Indian	32	15.0

### 2.2. Measurements

The General Matterning Scale was designed to evaluate levels of perceived mattering to others. It consisted of 5-items, scored on a 4-point Likert Scale ranging from 4 (very much) to 1 (not at all). Some examples of the items are: 'How important do you feel you are to other people' and 'How much do people

depend on you?'. Higher total scores reflecting more perceived mattering to others. Cronbach's Alpha ( $\alpha$ ) was reported as 0.85. Furthermore, the unconditional self-acceptance questionnaire (USAQ) was designed to assess participants' level of unconditional self-acceptance. It consisted of 20 items, scored on a 7-point Likert Scale, ranging from 1 (Almost Always Untrue) to 7 (Almost Always True). Nine items were worded in a way where higher scores represent greater USA (e.g., 'I avoid comparing myself to others to decide if I am a worthwhile person') whereas 11 items were reverse-scored as they were worded in a way that lower scores represent greater USA (e.g., 'I set goals for myself that I hope will prove my worth'). Cronbach's Alpha ( $\alpha$ ) was reported as .72. The multidimensional scale of perceived social support (MSPSS) was designed to measure an individual's perception of support from 3 sources: family, friends and a significant other [18]. MSPSS consisted of 12 items, scored on a 7-point Likert Scale, ranging from 1(Very Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Very Strongly Agree). Some examples of the items are: 'There is a special person who is around when I am in need' and 'I can count on my friends when things go wrong'. Higher total scores indicating higher perceived social support. Cronbach's Alpha ( $\alpha$ ) was reported as .72, indicating suitable internal reliability for research use. Lastly, the state self-esteem scale (SSES) is a 20-item scale that measures participant's self-esteem at a given point in time. The 20 items are subdivided into 3 components of self-esteem: performance self-esteem, social self-esteem and appearance self-esteem [31]. All items are scored on a 5-point Likert Scale, with 1 being 'not at all', and 5 being 'extremely'. Some examples of the items are: 'I feel confident about my abilities' and 'I feel good about myself'. Items 2,4,5,7,8,10,13,15,16,17,18,19, and 20 are reverse-scored. Higher scores indicating higher state self-esteem, with the internal reliability of the subscales ranges from .73 to .81 [32].

### 2.3. Procedures

Prior to conducting this study, approval was obtained from the Institutional Ethics Committee (IEC), UCSI University, Malaysia. The current study was disseminated through social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Whatsapp and LinkedIn by using investigator's account, followed by the link of the online survey of this study. Individuals who fulfilled the study requirements, and were willing to participate voluntarily were required to click on the provided link that would be directed to a Google form with the online survey. Before attempting to answer the questionnaires, participants were required to read and agree on the informed consent by clicking 'I agree' option. This would help to protect the rights and privacy of the participants. Subsequently, participants were required to complete demographic questionnaires, Section A (The General Mattering Scale), Section B (USAQ), Section C (MSPSS) and Section D (SSES) in the google form. It took no more than 15 minutes to complete. Upon completion of the survey, participants were thanked and encouraged to share the link of the study to those who fulfilled the study requirements. Lastly, the submitted data was analyzed by investigator.

### 2.4. Data analysis

The Mahalanobis distance (MD) [33] was utilized to identify multivariate outliers based on the distribution pattern of data points. Generally, the MD uses a covariance matrix of variables to discover the distance between two points. It was suggested that the degree of freedom equals to the total number of variables in the regression, the MD analysis was then referred to Chi-square distribution ( $\chi^2$ ) to check the degree of freedom [34], [35], it accounted for 18.47 critical Chi-square value ( $p=0.001$ ). As a result, a total of 6 data sets that consisted of MD values greater than 18.47 were then eliminated as they were deemed multivariate outliers. Therefore, out of 220 responses, only 214 responses were taken into account in the current study. Further analyses on mediation and serial mediation were conducted with bootstrap method with 5,000 samples and 97% confidence interval through PROCESS Macro model 6 for serial mediation with two mediators.

The assumption of homoscedasticity, which also known as the assumption of equal variances assume that different samples carry the same variance, despite coming from different populations [36]. As shown in Figure 2, the residuals were quite normally distributed despite showing a slightly left skewed pattern. The skewness and kurtosis were .89 and 1.20 respectively, which was less than 2. This implied that the distribution was deemed symmetrical even with a slightly left skewed pattern. And unlikely to produce outliers. Furthermore, a linear model appeared to fit the data as the residuals were randomly scattered on a horizontal line as shown in Figure 2. In other words, the variation in residuals was almost similar at all levels of the predicted outcome, so the outcome was more or less equally predicted at all levels of the dependent variable. Hence, there was no clear indications of violation for homoscedasticity.

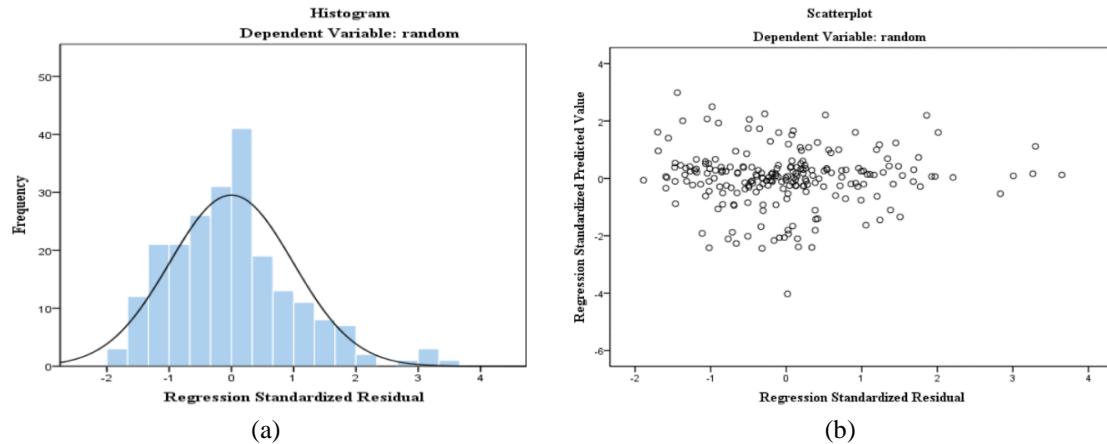


Figure 2. The graph gender of religiosity has been illustrated in (a) Histogram for normal distribution and (b) Scatterplot below depicts the relationship between predicted value and residual

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Scale reliability does not only provide an insight into the properties of measurement scales and the items that form the scales, but also provides information about the relationships between each item of the scale. The Cronbach's alpha values of all scales were greater than .70 and above, indicating good internal reliability as shown in Table 2. The Cronbach's alpha values of the scales used for mediators, including MSPSS and SSES were .92 and .90 respectively. On the other hand, the Cronbach's alpha values of the scale used for independent variable, The GMS, was .75 whereas the Cronbach's alpha value was .79 for the unconditional self-acceptance questionnaire (USAQ), which is the scale used for dependent variable.

#### 3.1. Direct effect

Direct effect occurs when the relationship between independent and dependent variables is direct and not mediated by any potential mediators. As indicated in Table 2, there was no direct effect between mattering and unconditional self-acceptance ( $b=.09$ ,  $t=.31$ ,  $p=.76$ ). The 'zero' falls within the 95% confidence interval (-.459, .631). In other words, the relationship between mattering and unconditional self-acceptance was not statistically significant. Thus, the hypothesis that mattering significantly predicts unconditional self-acceptance was not supported. In other words, mattering alone does not significantly predict USA.

#### 3.2. Indirect effect

The result in this section examines the hypothesis that the indirect relationship between the independent and dependent variables is equal to zero. The indirect effect was 1.88 with a 95% bootstrap confidence interval of 1.26 to 2.54, indicating that 'zero' does not fall within the 95% confidence interval as shown in Table 2. In other words, the mediation process on the relationship between mattering and unconditional self-acceptance was statistically significant. Therefore, further analysis was done to examine the mediation effects of both mediators, including PSS and SSE on the relationship between mattering and USA.

#### 3.3. Total effect

The total effect generally equals to the sum of direct and indirect effects as mentioned above. As shown in Table 2, result indicated that the total effect was statistically significant ( $b=1.96$ ,  $t=5.92$ ,  $p<.05$ ). This is because 'zero' does not fall within the 95% confidence interval (1.310, 2.617). Overall, there was a significant mediation effect on the mediation model.

#### 3.4. Hayes PROCESS macro model 6

Since the current study involved two mediators, Hayes process macro (model 6) with bootstrapping method was adopted to examine if PSS and SSE performed the serial mediation on the relationship between mattering and USA. At the beginning, the regression analysis implied that mattering was a significant predictor of PSS [ $R=.15$ ,  $b=1.90$ ,  $t(212)=6.20$ ,  $p<.001$ ], suggesting that approximately 15% of variance in PSS was accounted for by mattering. Subsequently, the second regression analysis revealed that mattering significantly predicted SSE [ $R^2=.21$ ,  $b=2.21$ ,  $t(211)=6.43$ ,  $p<.001$ ] whereas PSS did not significantly predict SSE [ $R^2=.21$ ,  $b=.07$ ,  $t(211) = .93$ ,  $p = .36$ ]. In other words, the variance accounted for SSE was 21%, as predicted by mattering. The third regression analysis indicated that both mattering [ $R^2=.58$ ,  $b=.09$ ,  $t(210)=.31$ ,  $p=.76$ ] and

PSS [ $R^2=.58$ ,  $b=.08$ ,  $t(210)=1.45$ ,  $p=.15$ ] did not significantly predict USA. Nonetheless, SSE significantly predicted USA in third regression analysis [ $R^2=.58$ ,  $b=.74$ ,  $t(210)=14.67$ ,  $p<.001$ ]. Thus, result suggested that approximately 58% of variance in USA was predicted by SSE.

In terms of indirect effect. The results indicated that there was no significant serial mediation effect, where PSS and SSE did not significantly mediate the relationship between mattering and USA ( $b=.09$ ,  $t=.78$ ), with a 95% CI (-.114, .341). Similarly, it was also indicated that PSS did not significantly mediate the relationship between mattering and USA ( $b=.14$ ,  $t=1.17$ ), with a 95% CI (-.092, .389). However, there was a significant indirect positive relationship between mattering and USA in the presence of SSE as a mediator, ( $b=1.64$ ,  $t=5.13$ ), with a 95% CI (1.041, 2.340). Furthermore, SSE was accounted for 83.67% of total effect on the relationship between mattering and USA ( $P_m=1.64/1.96$ ). Overall, mattering was not a significant predictor of USA in the absence of SSE [ $R^2=.58$ ,  $b=.09$ ,  $t(210)=.31$ ,  $p=.76$ ], indicating full mediation; in other words, individuals with higher senses of mattering tend to develop higher perception that they were being supported by their social circle, and the higher they perceived so, the more they accept themselves unconditionally. Mediation summary is presented in Table 2.

**Table 2. Mediation analysis summary**

Variable/Effect	b	SE	t	p	95% Confidence interval
Mattering → PSS → USA	.14	.12	1.17	-	-.092 .389
Mattering → SSE → USA	1.64	.32	5.13	-	1.041 2.340
Mattering → PSS → SSE → USA	.09	.12	.78	-	-.114 .341
<i>Effects</i>					
Direct	.086	.276	.31	.76	-.459 .631
Indirect*	1.88	.332	-	-	1.260 2.547
Total	1.96	.332	5.92	<.001	1.310 2.617

Note: based on Bootstrap 5,000 samples

### 3.5. Summary of the results

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the current study aims to investigate the serial mediation with PSS and SSE serially mediating the relationship between mattering and USA among our participants. The results indicated that serial mediation did not occur in the current study, in which there was no significant indirect effect of both PSS and SSE on the relationship between mattering and USA. In other words, result revealed that PSS did not significantly mediate the participants' USA despite the presence of SSE as another mediator. As such, the hypothesis that both PSS and SSE significantly mediate the relationship between mattering and USA was not supported. Likewise, PSS alone did not mediate the relationship between mattering and USA. Additionally, findings of this study also suggested that participants' sense of mattering did not significantly predict their level of USA without the mediation role of SSE. Thus, it can be summarized that when individuals believe that they matter, they would likely to perceive that they are socially included and not marginalized or left behind. In turn, they would accept themselves unconditionally despite their flaws and imperfections.

### 3.6. Discussion on findings

As expected, the results of the study showed consistency with past findings suggested that mattering is a predictor of SSE among the university students who studied fully online during the pandemic outbreak [37]–[40]. The finding of this current study is also in line with some previous studies, which highlighted that state self-esteem was not only formed by an individual's appraisals of themselves, but also relies on the perception of mattering from the people around them [41], [42].

Therefore, the current study suggested that young adults may require a sense of mattering that guides them to value themselves before they appraise themselves positively or negatively; If a positive self-evaluation is formed, which implies good levels of self-esteem, they tend to feel more confident in their personal relationships and be more likely to feel valued by others [3], [39]. As their SSE increases, they are less likely to require the need for approval from others because they are not interested in a competition for worth. In turn, their USA is likely to increase despite their flaws and imperfections. Past research revealed that individuals with higher USA tend to view themselves positively during self-rating process. As a result, they are more resistant in ego-provoking situations, such as failures and uncertainties [43].

Contrary to previous research, another finding of the current research indicated that mattering was not a significant predictor of USA and that the indirect effect of PSS on the relationship between mattering and USA was not significant among young adults. Past study suggested that there may be other underlying factors affecting one's level of PSS, thereby affecting the direct effect of mattering on USA. Indeed, it was suggested that both mattering and PSS were unable to develop without social interaction [37], [44]. Social interaction

plays a role in an individual's PSS; thus, he or she is less likely to develop PSS without social interaction [45]. Similarly, past research also stated that sense of mattering includes the relational dimension of one's identity, which stems from significant relationship with others. Thus, each individual experiences different levels of mattering as it depends on their relationship with others [46]. In other words, an individual's sense of mattering and perception of social support from those in their social network are usually developed via social interaction.

Therefore, the contradictory findings of the current study could be explained by changes in nature of social interactions due to the impact of COVID-19 pandemic. In order to control and prevent the spread of COVID-19, government has announced restrictions on non-essential activities (i.e., indoor, and outdoor gatherings) in Malaysia. To reduce social interaction, both classroom learning and traditional office jobs were replaced by virtual learning and remote working not to mention the need to avoid crowded areas and practice social distancing when interacting with others during the pandemic. Clearly, digital communication seems to be the 'new normal' instead of face-to-face interaction due to the shift to virtual classes and remote work [47]. Thus, it is likely to believe that higher dependence on digital communication might reduce the possibilities of receiving physical social support from others due to the increased isolation [48]. As such, this could explain why the current findings are contradictory to previous research as all of the previous research did not conduct within the COVID-19 pandemic. Consequently, the changes in the nature of social interaction might alter one's perception of social support, thereby affecting its indirect effect on the relationship between mattering and USA. Hence, this explains why the current findings indicated that there was no significant direct effect of mattering on USA, even if it was mediated by PSS.

In addition to that, recent research stated that reduced physical social interaction could increase young adults' social media usage during COVID-19 pandemic, thereby enhancing their social interaction motives [49]. As a result, it was indicated that the information-seeking process via social media platform does not only reduce uncertainty, but also allows them to feel more in control towards the perceived threats, when individuals accepted that things are out of personal control and started to accept themselves in a non-judgmental way, they believe that unexpected events, such as life crisis (i.e., COVID-19 pandemic) would not last. Therefore, this might be the underlying factor that affects young adults' USA level in this study. As a result, mattering alone would not predict the USA without the sense of state self-esteem (perceived social inclusion).

### 3.7. Implication

The importance of the current study could not be underestimated as the results were encouraging and warrant additional research on mattering. As mentioned in previous chapter, a number of mattering-related past studies were conducted in school context in recent years [41], [42], [50]. Majority of the mattering-related studies were conducted among undergraduate students and adolescents in western countries. Thus, the current study was designed to conduct among the university students in Klang Valley, Malaysia, with an expectation to contribute further information in the respective field. Moreover, this study may help to contribute to the theories that SSE plays a significant role in influencing the relationship between mattering and USA among university students. In other words, the findings of current study suggested that mattering could predict USA only in the presence of SSE. The practical implication of this study is that this may contribute to young adults' population by emphasizing the importance of USA in ego-provoking situations or life crisis (i.e., COVID-19 pandemic). For instance, workshops or webinars can be carried out to not only promote the importance of self-acceptance, but also providing tips on how to improve their USA. In turn, this would allow them to build a healthier psychological wellbeing, thereby reducing a variety of emotional difficulties such as depression and anxiety [42]. Overall, the gap of the current study was addressed and the findings of the study could be contributed to the relevant field and the society.

### 3.8. Limitation and future studies

While the current study yielded several findings, certain limitations should be taken into account. Firstly, the study merely relied on self-report questionnaires as a form of data collection, indicating that there may be inaccurate perceptions due to social desirability response bias, as the survey was completed online without the presence of the researcher, participants might have the tendency to present a favorable image of themselves by overreporting positive self-descriptions. Additionally, instead of utilizing multiple measures of mattering (i.e., interpersonal mattering, societal mattering), only a general measure of mattering was utilized to assess participants' mattering level. Thus, it may be argued that the predictive utility of mattering was underestimated in the current study.

Further, the population of this current study was considered small at 500; nevertheless, it could not be avoided because the data collection was conducted after the third waves of COVID-19 outbreak, where the regulation of remote learning was canceled in university X when only 214 participants were recruited. The remaining candidates of participants could not be recruited as they had gone back to the in-person (physical) classroom studies. Thus, we stopped the data collection process to maintain the exclusiveness of the participants who were under the influence of remote learning during the pandemic.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, state self-esteem (SSE) fully mediates the relationship between mattering and unconditional self-acceptance (USA) among the students of University X amidst the COVID-19 pandemic in Klang Valley, Malaysia. The result suggested that serial mediation did not occur in the current study as only one mediator, SSE significantly mediates the relationship between mattering and USA. SSE fully mediates the association, which means that there was no significant direct effect of mattering on USA when controlling for SSE. Thus, the current study suggested that when young adults feel that they matter, they would likely to feel that they are socially included. In turn, individuals who do not feel that they are excluded or marginalized tend to accept themselves unconditionally, especially in ego-provoking situation or life crisis such as COVID-19 pandemic.

On top of that, the findings also shed light on the important role of SSE in this relationship as it could help to enhance level of USA among young adults amid the COVID-19 pandemic in Malaysia. Future studies are suggested to expand the study by conducting a qualitative research interview to gain a deeper insight into perspectives regarding mattering from participants. Future research is also suggested to narrow down the mattering aspect by emphasizing on a single aspect of mattering (i.e., interpersonal mattering, societal mattering) during endemic, and thus able to further investigate whether other underlying factors could contribute to the relevant field.

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